

Full Length Research

Zimbabwe: the challenge of Democracy from below, 1980 to 2013

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The independence of Zimbabwe from colonial rule in 1980 brought with it hope and optimism of democracy. The independent Zimbabwe inherited an authoritarian state and undemocratic institutions, and therefore had a huge responsibility of democratizing. The post colonial government managed to make significant achievements in socio-economic gains for the black population through expanded provisions of health and educational facilities, as well as infrastructural developments such as roads, boreholes, schools and clinics. The post independent state in Zimbabwe however failed to provide full democracy to its people. Although there have been regular elections in Zimbabwe, based on adult universal suffrage in 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 and recently 2013, this paper argues that Zimbabwe has not yet fully democratized. The continued existence of repressive laws governing public order, access to information as well as the heavy handedness of law enforcement agents and state security agents against opposition members, human rights activists, government critics and members of the media fraternity is a clear demonstration of Zimbabwe's failure to fully democratize. This paper makes an analysis of how Zimbabwe has for the period under review failed to uphold basic rights and freedoms of the people and interrogate specific events and activities before, during and after elections to demonstrate how the state has failed in its duty to fully democratize. This paper will conclude by giving recommendations and suggestions on how the challenges to full democracy in Zimbabwe can be overcome.

Key Words: Democracy, full democracy, democracy from below, social movements, authoritarianism

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy from below is a system of governance whereby the state and government institutions allow for direct participation of citizens in the shaping and implementation of public policies, management and

administration.¹ The attributes of democracy from below

¹ Archon Fung and Erick Olin Wright. *Deepening Democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory*

are: a) the existence of a strong and independent judiciary that is able to curtail excessive executive powers through making sound and effective judgments capable of protecting and advancing citizens' rights; b) use of a referenda system where people vote directly to proposed legislation and have a direct input into the content of the law that governs them, c) use of open public hearings whereby citizens are allowed to respond to public policies and politicians are made to listen and seriously take genuine public concerns and implement them; d) public issue campaigns are allowed, whereby citizens are allowed to freely express themselves through campaigns, petitions, written letters, telephone calls or any other means of communication to express their views on some specific issues to public officials; e) social protests such as public rallies, demonstrations and sometimes civil disobedience, that engage a wide range of peaceful disruptive protests, to compel the government or state institutions to respond to the general public concerns, and; f) empowered participatory governance where citizens meet policy makers individually or in groups and deeply engage them in solving pressing and difficult public concerns. Any state that functions in the above manner is practicing democracy from below and is actually functioning in what in this paper is termed as full democracy.

Zimbabwe is operating under a system of semi-Presidential model of democracy. This system has an executive president, heading the executive arm of government, with a West minister style bi-cameral Parliament, with the House of Assembly being the Lower House responsible for initiating legislation, whilst the Senate is the Upper House through which legislation passes before being forwarded to the Executive for Presidential assent. The third arm of government is the Judiciary, headed by the Chief-Justice of the Constitutional Court. This paper suggests that the governmental system in Zimbabwe has not functioned in a way that allows for the full realization and achievement of democratic outcomes and have in various ways demonstrated that they are not democratic institutions that allow for wide and effective citizen participation in public policy issues. Many laws that are in place in Zimbabwe as well as many policies where the concerns of the general populace have not been taken into account are indicative of the lack of democracy from below. The existence of laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Public Order and Security Act, Broadcasting Services Act, Official Secrets Act, Interception of Communication Act and the Criminal Law [Codification and Reform] Act, which have all worked to suppress citizen participation and civil and political liberties in various ways are a clear demonstration of how the government of Zimbabwe has had challenges in

implementing democracy from below. There have been widespread and systematic arrests of opposition political activists, civil rights activists, journalist and members of the civil society in Zimbabwe, which has made democracy from below unattainable. The civil liberties have been gradually eroded in Zimbabwe and ordinary citizen live in fear of the state and state agents and as such have not been able to effectively participate in public policy development and implementation.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study combines a number of research methods. It makes use of document analysis, drawing on primary materials especially in the form of newspaper articles and extracts of speeches by the major participants, as well as secondary sources scattered across several libraries in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The primary records cover the period from the mid 1980s to approximately around 2013. The study also makes use of personal interviews with a wide variety of people acquainted with the matter under scrutiny. Given the sensitive nature of the subject under discussion and also for ethical considerations their names cannot be disclosed. To gather a balanced view the accounts of both perceived perpetrators of violence and the views of the victims were also solicited. Additionally the writers also attended a number of workshops organized by civil society organizations such as the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET), Public Information and Rights Forum (PIRF), Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN) and the Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe (CCZ). These workshops were attended prior to and on the aftermath of the run up to the hotly contested 2008 elections and the controversial 2013 elections. The writers were thus able to gain firsthand information from participants in the democratization process in Zimbabwe. The organizations listed above tend(ed) to be critical of the democratization process in the country and so to counterbalance their views those of officialdom were also gathered, for instance from interest groups such as the war veterans, official mouthpieces as well as members from the ruling ZANU-PF party.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The concept of democracy is a hotly contested one. Various authors have attached different meanings and institutional frameworks to it. Dahl (1989: 5) cited by Bratton and Van de Walle (1997:10) defines it as, "... a distinctive set of political institutions and practices, a particular body of rights, a social and economic order, a system that ensures desirable results, or a unique process of making collective and binding decisions". A classic definition of democracy has been given by

Schumpeter (1976: 260) who says it is an, "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by a competitive struggle for the people's vote". Macpherson (1973) quoted by Bratton and Van de Walle (1997: 10) defines democracy as, "expansive visions of citizen participation in political parties, community groups, and work-place organizations". From the above definitions a number of issues are central to conceptualizing democracy. First elections are an integral part, if not an indispensable component, of democracy. Second, the participation of citizens in shaping decisions by which they are governed is quite an important ingredient of democracy. In fact democracy has been evolving over time having originated with the Ancient Greeks in the 5th century B.C. Imperial Romans, the political revolutions in England, the United States and France popularized the notion of popular sovereignty and republican elements while the Americans expanded the elements of universal suffrage and political party elements (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001).

Ayittey (2010) posit that the concept of democracy is a Western one and as such quite suited to the Western context and unsuitable to the African context. Gatsheni-Ndlovu also argues the concept will not be easily sustainable in Africa. He bases his argument on the fact that pre-colonial Africa had its own systems of governance replete with its own checks and balances. However, this paper will elaborate that there is nothing Western about democracy and it can therefore be applied universally and particularly in Zimbabwe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni cited in Ake (1991:30-34) who was dismissive of the notion that democracy was alien to Africa in the following terms:

Premised on the misconception that democracy is solely a Western creation [and] stems from a confusion between principles of democracy and their institutional manifestations. The principles of democracy include widespread participation, consent of the governed and public accountability. These principles may prevail in a variety of political arrangements and practices, which naturally vary according to historical conditions. Traditional African systems were infused with democratic values. They were invariably patrimonial, and consciousness was communal; everything was everybody's business, engendering a strong emphasis on participation. Standards of accountability were stricter than in Western societies. Chiefs were answerable not only for their actions but for natural catastrophes such as famine, epidemics, floods, and drought. In the event of such disasters, chiefs could be required to go to exile or be 'asked to die' (Ake, 1991:30-34 cited by Ndlovu- Gatsheni).

Ayittey (2010) argues that for it to be suitable to the African context democracy has to be adapted to suit the prevailing and historical conditions in Africa. Gyimah-Boadi (2001) believes that the African historical context should be brought to the fore in order to make it adaptable to modern democracy. Gyimah-Boadi (2001) further notes that, if we are to root modern democracy in African values and traditions, the intellectual focus should be on "determining the core of those African values and traditions that are essential to and consistent with governance in contemporary circumstances (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001: 18). Even if such African values and traditions were found the challenge would be to integrate them with Western liberal democracy so that the two do not become incompatible. Those African values should also not be used to dilute democracy because Africans deserve no less. To date no such model as African democracy has been invented and so it means that we continue to judge our democratic practices against western liberal democracy. However, this is not to imply that the search for a suitable type of democracy for Africa should be abdicated.

Modern democracy thus has become intricately linked with representative and participatory democracy. This is the kind of democracy which goes beyond citizens voting to choose who represents them in government. It is a system which works towards the full inclusion and participation of citizens in critical decisions and policies of the state. Decision – making where democracy from below is applied therefore ceases to be the prerogative of the chosen few, whose choices of course are informed by the wishes of those whom they represent but active participation of citizens in the way the government functions. The political elites (the chosen few), just like the traditional leaders, are the ones who make final decisions but after an input from citizens. What is critical however, as Ndlovu – Gatsheni postulates, is to craft "a working and sustainable democracy for Africa", "one that is inculcated from below", "a democracy that is amenable to the everyday demands of peasants and workers for food, clean water and shelter" (Ndlovu- Gatsheni, 2008). Democracy from below therefore connotes the elimination of the paradigm of exclusion of people in decision making processes.

Background to the Study

Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 after dislodging a racist settler regime led by Ian Douglas Smith after a blood war of independence called the 2nd Chimurenga. The colonial racist regime had denied citizens the most basic democratic rights. Lack of freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, the right to freely participate in the governance of the country and access to education were some of the deprivations of the

most basic democratic rights. Africans were also deprived of basic rights during the colonial era in Zimbabwe. Generally Africans were de-enfranchised and political repression was the order of the day. The voters roll was divided into two along racial lines. Most Africans could not meet the stringent property and educational prerequisites for the right to vote. Access to basic services like health and education was also unequal between the races. The whites enjoyed most of the modern services little wonder they described themselves an island of white and as the leaven of civilization and articulated the two pyramids system in which Africans would be hewers of wood and drawers of water. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009:73) the construction of the early colonial state was characterized by ambiguities and contradictions as it tried to avoid open and direct African resistance but at the same it proceeded with social and spatial segregation and dispossession of African people. Early struggles were therefore inevitable but these were reformist. With time, however, the struggles became radical. From accommodation, they now contested for state power especially from the late 1950s onwards. It was against the backdrop of these grievances that the liberation movements led by ZANU-PF and PF – ZAPU took up arms to dislodge and contested for state power culminating in independence². What the liberation movement was fighting for was for democracy and full citizen participation in government in what was popularly termed ‘one man, one vote’ as the slogan for independence. Equality and freedom were the basic tenants of the liberation movement. This paper therefore seeks to trace how the state failed to entrench democracy from below in its policy formulation and implementation.

The Promise for a Better Zimbabwe

The prospects for a better Zimbabwe and better tomorrow were encapsulated in the independence speech the triumphant Robert Mugabe of ZANU-PF articulated at his inauguration. He said:

Henceforth you and I must strive to adapt ourselves, intellectually and spiritually to the reality of our political change and relate to each other as brothers bound by a bond of

² For a detailed discussion on the role of the liberation movements in the armed struggle see N.Bhebe, ZAPU and ZANU Guerilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1999. Also informative is N. Bhebe and T. Ranger (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995.

comradeship. If yesterday I fought as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interests, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. Is it not folly, therefore, that in these circumstances anybody should seek to revive the wounds and grievances of the past? The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten (Mugabe: 1980).

The reconciliation speech by Mugabe was meant to allay the fears of the local whites who could easily have emigrated en mass given the atrocities committed during the armed liberation struggle. In Mozambique the Portuguese had emigrated in droves and dozens fearing a backlash from The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO). The result was that the development prospects for the country were scuttled at birth since the fleeing whites had destroyed most of the infrastructure necessary for the reconstruction challenge. The international community’s fears of a backlash against its kith and kin needed to be allayed as well so that it could assist in the daunting task of post-war reconstruction.

Mugabe continued;

It could never be a correct justification that because the Whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the blacks must oppress them today because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practiced by white against black or black against white. Our majority rule would easily turn into inhuman rule if we oppressed, persecuted or harassed those who do not look or think like the majority of us (Mugabe, 1980).

The noble intentions and articulation were, however, not matched by actions on the ground. The post – colonial regime was soon pre-occupied with consolidating its hold on state power and that was to explain its disregard for the inclusivity that the leadership was pontificating. The high sounding reconciliation speech should be more acknowledged in racial terms but not in ethnic terms. This is because there existed under-currents of completion between the Patriotic Front (PF) that is ZANU- PF and PF- ZAPU. The regime unleashed an orgy of violence against the Ndebele elements that were unhappy with the way the demobilization was going on. The ruthlessness with which dissent was crushed has been termed Gukurahundi and it has been the subject of numerous

studies³. Joshua Nkomo, leader of the main opposition party, who had been given a junior ministry in the first government narrowly escaped death by fleeing into Botswana. The other leaders of PF- ZAPU such as Dumiso Dabengwa, Lookout Masuku, Makhatini Guduza and others were incarcerated on charges of recruiting, inciting and training dissidents (Todd, 2007:191) and only released on the eve of unity talks. Peace was only established with the swallowing of ZAPU under the Unity Agreement in December 1987.

Another promise of a better future was when donors buoyed by Mugabe's statesmanship poured in fairly huge sums of money for infrastructural development at the ZIMCORD conference in 1981. Pro- labour legislation such as the 1985 Labour Relations Act (LRA) that provided for shop-floor labour organization, minimum wage legislation, Legal Age of Majority Act and the Employment Act that sought to protect workers from arbitrary retrenchment all combined to provide a flicker of hope for a better tomorrow. During May Day celebrations the Head of State and labour leaders addressed workers side by side outlining measures to improve their lot and the economy in general. Government had a hand in the formation of the national labour centre, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) as it sought to place labour under its ambit. Albert Mugabe, a brother to the then Prime Minister and Makwarimba were among the first leaders of the ZCTU (Mandaza, 1987). This state - labour alliance continued until divorce came in the late 1980s when radical leaders like Gibson Sibanda (President) and Morgan Tsvangirai (Secretary –General) took over the leadership of the ZCTU.

During much of the 1980s the government committed itself rhetorically to establishing a state based on Marxist-Leninist ethos. For instance, as late as 1989 the party was affirming its commitment to the socialist ideology and that its leadership would be guided by the leadership code (ZANU-PF Unity Congress Resolutions, 1989). State leaders were discouraged from acquiring land and wealth at the expense of the masses. Co-operatives of various sizes and for various enterprises were established. Several studies have, however, shown that

³ Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My life* (1984) has a chilling account of the atrocities that were committed by the Mugabe regime in its quest to eradicate "dissidents". Nkomo himself, leader of the opposition PF- ZAPU missed escaped death by a whisker when he skipped the country into Botswana during Gukurahundi. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP:1997) also carried out a study on this counterinsurgency culminating in *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980 to 1988*, Harare: Legal resources Foundation, 1997. S. J. Ndlovu- Gatsheni (2001) has also done some research into these disturbances.

by day the government preached socialism while at night they practiced capitalism (Astrow, 1982, Bond and Manyanya, 2004). The 1980s and 1990s were marked by a slow pace of land redistribution for the masses while the chiefs acquired large tracts of land for themselves. Kanyenze (2004) and Sachikonye (2004) have succinctly shown how Lancaster provisions, corruption and lethargy in the corridors of power combined to circumscribe land redistribution in Zimbabwe.

Early and Serious Challenges to Democratization

As alluded to above the earliest challenges to the opening of democratic space related to the Matabeleland massacres where an estimated 20000 people lost their lives (CCJP, 1997). Ostensibly carried out as counter-insurgency measures the massacres were carried out to weaken Joshua Nkomo's party which was seen as an affront to President Mugabe's- then Prime Minister-hold on power. State response to the uprising can be interpreted as being two pronged. First, the insurgency was ruthlessly crushed by Korean trained Fifth Brigade so as to send a clear message that opposition to the government was not brooked. Second, with destabilization activities in Mozambique, the government might have wanted to send a clear message to opponents that it was ready for military encounter. The massacres were only ended with the Unity Accord of December 1987 which established what can be described as the first government of national unity (GNU) in post- colonial Zimbabwe.

Another early challenge to democratization relates to the idea of wanting to create a one- party state. The head of government was an admirer of the Eastern bloc particularly China and Russia where the one party state regime were in place. Up to 1989 the leadership was still committed to the one-party state project until Edgar Tekere protested and broke away from the ruling ZANU PF and formed the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) which won about twenty (20) percent of the votes in the 1990 General elections, which were far from being free and fair. There were systematic attacks on ZUM candidates by state security agents such as Kanengoni and Chivamba who shot Patrick Kombayi on the thigh in Gweru. This was the opposition that scuttled the one party state project. The party was formed when Tekere was expelled from the party for being vocal against growing corruption in the party leadership as evidenced by the Willogate scandal that received so much national condemnation (Interview). The Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) leadership was professing socialism by the day yet at night they were busy amassing wealth (and land) for themselves.

Dissent against the cancer of corruption in the society was not taken lightly. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade

Unions ((ZCTU) and University of Zimbabwe (UZ) students who demonstrated against corruption were ruthlessly dealt with. UZ leaders such as Arthur Mutambabra and others were arrested for spearheading the anti-corruption demonstrations and when Tsvangirai, then Secretary –General of the ZCTU remonstrated against the student leaders' continued imprisonment he was also arrested (Huddleston, 2005). The heavy-handedness with which the state was reacting to criticism is characteristic of autocracy. This was symptomatic of more repression that was to come. However, despite the repression, students, academics, poets and others continued with their criticism of the state. Even within the ruling party there were dissenting voices in the form of Lazarus Nzarayebani, Sydney Malunga and Welshman Mabhena, among others.

Grappling with Labour Unrest in the 1990s

The labour unrest was a public reaction and rage against failed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). The Bretton Woods institutions - induced SAP supposedly put in place to restructure and place the economy on a sound footing failed dismally. Instead of creating employment and up-lifting the people's standards of living the programme resulted in retrenchments and declining standards of living. The deleterious consequences of ESAP is a subject that has received considerable scholarly attention (Mlambo, 1997; Kanyenze: 2004). All the authors agree that overall the programme had negative effects on the socio-economic welfare of the implementing countries. Trade liberalization resulted in company closures and devaluation resulted in declining real wages. Tremendous strides in the education and health sectors were rolled back. The hardships that were unleashed by forces from SAP are the ones that the labour movement protested against. One of the most serious industrial actions in post- colonial Zimbabwe was the 1996 civil service strike. This strike was well organized and illustrated labour resiliency against a regime that had failed to reduce poverty among the workers. The 1996 nation-wide strike was followed by more nation-wide strikes in 1997 and the stay - aways of 1998. Government countered the stay-aways in a heavy-handed manner. The ZCTU leadership was often arrested and accused of harbouring political motives, a charge they flatly refused. However, it can be argued by that by calling for the stay-away the ZCTU leadership was testing its popularity with the generality of the people. Once they realized that they were very popular they developed the guts to form a political party.

The decision by the Zimbabwean government to pay \$Z50 000.00 gratuities to liberation war fighters in 1997 exacerbated Zimbabwe's socio-economic challenges, as manifested on 14 November 1997, when the

Zimbabwean dollar lost 74% of its value (Bond 2007). Sachikonye (2006) further posits Zimbabwe's intervention in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1998 as another expensive expedition, with some estimates putting the average daily cost at US \$1 million. Such military expedition resulted in the ballooning of the budget deficit, an increase in inflation and the erosion of real earnings. Military involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1998 did not go well with the general populace and some parliamentarians as it was unilaterally declared without the consent of Zimbabweans. The engagement resulted in unexplained government activities, and this was a clear signal of unaccountability on the part of the government to the people of Zimbabwe. A confluence of these challenges saw an increase in poverty levels, making it difficult for many families to afford basic needs.

It is this paradigm of exclusion of citizens in major national decisions and policies that created a tension between the state and the labour movements, students, civil society and the general population. This resulted in more confrontations between the government and its citizens and the rise of a strong opposition to the government. The Liberation War Veterans demonstrations led by Chenjerai Hunzvi over the welfare of liberation fighters, food riots led by urban workers, as well as the land violence by liberation fighters and peasants in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s are a clear indication of the frustration of the general populace over the way the government was running national affairs without taking into consideration the views of the people.

Serious Repression in the New Millennium

Instead of democracy becoming entrenched with more years of independence the country's democratic credentials in fact nose-dived. The significant turning point in the history of Zimbabwe was opened with the formation of a broad- based movement comprising labour, civil society, students and peasants- the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999. Engaging the authorities in order to improve the economy and conditions of living had all but failed and so the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA)⁴ metamorphosed into a political party. The first significant success of this new party was to campaign against a

⁴ The NCA was an umbrella body that was established by Zimbabwean citizens demanding a new constitution and putting to table with government citizens demands pertaining a new constitution. The government established a commission, headed by Justice Chidyausiku over the new constitution, but failed to cater for the concerns of people but those of the executive. As such the executive driven constitution they wrote was rejected at a referendum in 2000.

draft constitution that had been subjected to a referendum in February 2000. The MDC party together with the NCA was agitated by President Mugabe's inclusion in the draft constitution of clauses that gave him the right to stand for another two year terms as President and another that called for compulsory acquisition of land from the white commercial farmers without paying for it. The onus for payment was placed in the hands of the British government as provided for by the Lancaster Constitution (Sachikonye, 2004). With its first taste of defeat the ZANU-PF government was to throw any caution to the wind and became seriously brutal as it sought to keep its hold on power by any means necessary.

A common practice in politics is to demonise in order to find a justification to destroy. For campaigning for the No vote in the referendum the NCA and MDC were labeled as fronts for Western imperialism. President Mugabe has consistently rejected that the MDC is a locally based and originated party preferring to refer to it as a puppet for the whites (Blair, 2002). He has always perceived the MDC as part and parcel of a western regime change machination against his rule. To achieve the twin objectives of punishing the commercial farmers who had campaigned against the referendum and to win the support of landless movements (war veterans, peasants and some land hungry urbanites) the government unleashed a reign of terror against the commercial farmers. On an unprecedented scale the landless movements led by the war veterans⁵ embarked on land invasions that were popularly termed *jambanja*. White commercial farmers were forced to flee their farms while others were killed. The case of the ruthless murder of Martin Olds in the Nyamandlovu area was just a tip of iceberg in the calculated terror against white farmers. Thus, as Sachikonye (2004) observed land hunger was manipulated to improve the electoral fortunes of ZANU-PF. More was to come despite various courts judgments (Madhuku, 2004) that ruled against the invasions.

The ZANU - PF leadership argued that the land question was a political question which the courts could not resolve but had to be resolved politically and the government moved to amend section 16 of the Constitution, ousting the powers of the judiciary on land issues. The Commercial Farmers Union of Zimbabwe fought and won legal battles against the government of Zimbabwe in High court and Supreme Court of Zimbabwe, but the judgments were not enforced as the executive arm of the government refused to honor and enforce court judgments, thereby undermining

democracy and the rule of law. Provide explanation) At some point the Commissioner of Police, Augustine Chihuri argued that while he wanted to comply with court judgments he did not have the manpower to carry out the same. He went on to raise a political argument. He said that by forcefully evicting the land occupiers he was afraid that could spark public disorder as the persons involved were prepared to resist the police in the furtherance of their quest for land (Madhuku, 2004: 141)). To show tacit sympathy with the invaders Chihuri said that they were not the best institution to deal with the land question. In other words the police leaders were justifying their contempt for the court rulings. These arguments were however dismissed by the courts. One commentator (Madhuku, 2004) said that the manner in which the land occupations were carried out and the failure to implement court judgments meant that the rule of law in the country had been overthrown. This overthrow of the rule of law was to scare away Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the country, thus negatively impacting on employment creation.

The electoral environment preceding all elections after the emergence of the MDC has been by characterized by serious repression by the authorities. ZANU -PF employed youths and war veterans to unleash an orgy of violence on the people. In the run up to the June 2000 elections violence claimed the lives of MDC supporters including Tsvangirai's polling agent Tichaona Chiminya and his assistant Talent Mabika (Huddleston, 2005). The perpetrators of violence got even more vigour from the speeches and threats of their leader. President Mugabe has often said;" There will never come a day when the MDC will rule this country, Never, ever" (Mederith, 2002:210). The opposition MDC was(is) often described in imperialist terms while ZANU-PF saw(sees) itself as being more patriotic, what Bond and Manyanya (2003) characterize as 'Exhausted Nationalism'. President Robert Mugabe is also on recording for saying that the nationalists brought independence to Zimbabwe through the barrel of a gun and so the MDC would be day-dreaming to think that they could get the right to rule it through 'pen and paper' (Fx Documentary, Only in Africa, 5 September 2011). Dozens of people are believed to have died in the run up to all post- 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections. The deaths were from both ZANU-PF and the MDC but by far the latter had the greater number of casualties. In period leading to the Presidential run -off in June 2008 Tsvangirai had to withdraw his candidature in that election to save the lives of his supporters because he alleged that up to two hundred of his people had been killed.

In acts inimical to democratization freedom of association and freedom of expression were severely circumscribed through heinous legislation like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002 and the Access

⁵ The role of the war veterans of the Second Chimurenga in the land invasions is a topic that has been dealt with at length by W. Sadomba in his doctoral thesis 'War Veterans and the Land Occupation Movement in Zimbabwe' (2006) in the Netherlands.

to Information Protection and Privacy Act,(AIPPA) of 2002. Among a range of other deterrents to freedom of association POSA criminalized the publication of statements that are “prejudicial to the state” (Chuma, 2004:135). With a state so intolerant of criticism even the most objective kind of criticism could be described as being prejudicial to the state. AIPPA provided for the registration of journalists by a Media and Information Commission (MIC) constituted by known party loyalists like Tafataona Mahoso. It also provided for the registration of media organizations with the same commission. MIC would also accredit journalists to enable them to practise in the country and unaccredited journalists were barred from practising anywhere in the country. As a result of these repressive legislations foreign journalists working in the country were deported and there were also periodic arrests of local journalists working for private media houses (Chuma, 2004). POSA was reminiscent of the draconian colonial Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA) which criminalized freedom of association. This shows that the post -colonial state borrowed most of the repressive instruments used by the colonial authorities to gag the freedoms of their people. This gives weight to the thinking that liberator has turned dictator and that ‘democracy from below’ was seriously resisted by the post –colonial state in Zimbabwe.

As part and parcel of the consolidation of its hold on power the ZANU-PF government has assigned military and former military men to strategic positions in government. Strategic institutions such as the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) Air Commodore Karakadzai and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB)- Muvuti (now Albert Mandizha) and the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC)- Justice Chiweshe – were all men who have or had military backgrounds and owe their allegiance to President Mugabe’s party. The Zimbabwe Prison services (ZPS) and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) are headed by people with liberation war credentials and people who have openly declared their support for ZANU-PF. Others with military backgrounds have been seconded to ambassadorial posts and line ministries as permanent secretaries. Rupiya (2004) has posited internal and external factors for the politicization of the military. Externally, the excursion in the DRC incurred criticism from the United States (US) and Britain who imposed military sanctions on the Zimbabwe Defence Force (ZDF) while internally the MDC criticized the DRC war and earned the wrath of the military in the process (Rupiya, 2004).

These former military people have been major beneficiaries of the politics of patronage such that some of them have openly declared that they would never salute a presidential winner without liberation war credentials. ZPS boss Zimondi threatened to take up arms should ZANU-PF lose elections (Interview). Prior to

the 2002 Presidential election the security forces led by the then army commander- the late General Zvinvashe- had indicated that they would not salute any winner without liberation war credentials. This in essence amounted to a coup and a refusal to democratic change of government. The head of state and Commander-in-Chief of the army did not condemn such utterances as he should have done. Noteworthy is that the military men’s is not just blind patriotism. They have unwavering support for President Mugabe for a number of reasons. First, it is economic. Just like in Uganda where the army was a major beneficiary of Idi Amin’s expulsion of the Asians in 1972, in Zimbabwe the army has also stepped in the shoes of the displaced white commercial farmers. Second, a good number of these army chiefs also played varying and active roles during the Gukurahundi period and the fear of reprisals makes them to hang on tenaciously like that. This does not augur well for the democratization project. It shows a serious affront to the calls for democracy from below. All this has serious implications on the country’s ability to attract the much needed FDI. For more detail on this section, see Mapuva J (2010). “Militarisation of Public Institution...”

Even by 2013, the government of Zimbabwe refused an opportunity to embraces democracy from below. A new constitution was crafted, which was done through public consultations and referendum. In the first all stakeholders Conference, serious violence erupted, disrupting the constitutional making process. During the consultative meeting, ZANU PF improvised “operation chimumu” whereby all the people who were vocal in rural areas were supposed to be quiet during Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee meetings and only selected people were supposed to speak. The views of the ordinary citizens were not adequately captured. In the end the constitutional process which was supposed to be people driven but ended up as a negotiated document between ZANU PF and the MDC, where obviously due to the politics of incumbency ZANU PF had an upper hand.

Immediately after the Constitution of Zimbabwe was signed into law in May 2013, the President of Zimbabwe unilaterally announced 31 July as the election date, although no reforms had been done in the governance framework, required to guarantee credible, free and fair elections. Although there was no much violence during the elections were not credible, free and fair as war veterans and security agents remained a threat to the process. Opposition members were harassed and large numbers of the urban population was disenfranchised by the failure by Registrar General to register new voters. Stringent requirements were put in place where potential voters were required to produce proof of residence in form of utility bills in their names, when obviously the Registrar’s office was aware that a number of voters especially youths could not obtain the documents. Even the voters roll was not readily available to members of the

public and the opposition parties for inspection. This clearly shows that the will of the people was and still remains suppressed and subdued.

The Way Forward

In the face of intransigence by the President and his party, the way to go to press for more opening up of democratic space does not lie in the North African kind of revolutions like in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. There has been destruction of infrastructure and bloodshed in those countries. Indeed, if such revolutions were to occur in Zimbabwe there is a high probability that there would be serious casualties as the wielders of state power have “degrees in violence” (Blair, 2002). The run –up to the June 2008 run- off election is testimony to this point. A different route has to be followed. Each struggle is a result of its own peculiar socio- cultural, economic and political circumstances. Given this scenario, civil society, students, academia and all pro-democracy forces should coalesce and provide more voter education among themselves and the masses so that they vote for democracy in their numbers. Many potential voters have tended to watch the unfolding struggle for democracy from the terraces. They should register as voters and vote for democracy as well. Pro-democracy forces should also continue engaging the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and President Zuma of South Africa, as someone whose country bears the brunt of economic downturn in Zimbabwe and the African Union (AU). Even when the liberation forces were fighting for independence external connections were important. The Patriotic Forces had linkages with the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU), neighbouring countries and the Eastern as well as Western bloc. External linkages are therefore necessary in the quest for more democratization, and by extension, more development in Zimbabwe.

The other important way in which democracy from below can be fostered is by the strengthening of the institutions such as the judiciary as well as gradual and systematic institutional reform such as the security sector reform, including retiring hostile members of the security forces and also teaching human rights in the police and military trainings. Democracy from below is so far the most ideal way of maximizing citizen participation in decision making processes and reducing the tension between the government and the general populace, and if embraced well it can lead to sustainable peace and development.

CONCLUSION

The paper has analysed the various constraints that have

been faced by the democratization project in Zimbabwe. It has shown that the state was comfortable with championing democracy at its own pace which was rather too slow. As demands for further democratization gathered momentum the state responded with repression reminiscent of the days of colonialism. Draconian legislations like POSA and AIPPA were put in place to deal with clamors for democratization. Those who wield state power tenaciously hold on to it because access to state power facilitates access to economic resources. Despite the authoritarian manner in which the state responded to calls for opening up of more democratic space it is incumbent upon the masses and civil society to continue applying pressure without relent. The renowned Nigerian writer succinctly sums up what needs to be done: “Like development, democratization is not something that one person does for another. People must do it for themselves or it does not happen” (Ake, 1991: 38). There has to be a re-acquisition of power by the ordinary people who should be allowed to view and define development and democracy in their own terms. Obviously this opportunity will not be given on a silver platter by the current wielders of state power. Democracy is so desirable that despite the seemingly insurmountable odds people just have to continue applying pressure so that in the end it may be achieved. That way development might also ultimately be achieved.

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